

PS 1792

.F8

Copy 1

FRANCESCA
OF RIMINI

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

OF THE

ST.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



FRANCESCA OF RIMINI.

A P O E M.

BY A. S. H.

PHILADELPHIA:

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1878.



PS 1792

, F 8

Copyright, 1878, by J. B. LIPPINCOTT & Co.

FRANCESCA OF RIMINI.

I.

A WESTERN shore and marshy plain between,
Girt by a crumbling wall, a city stands
Alone. Men say there was none other seen
So joyous or so fair, in all those lands,
When decked as for a bride by royal hands,
Her excellence was as some jewel rare,
That many crowns had coveted to wear.

Like to a brilliant bound about her brow,
 Upon the darkening waters blazed her light,
For those who watched about the spray-wet brow,
 To catch its distant flashings through the night ;
 Or safe within her circling arms, the white
Ships slept with folded wings, a happy hour
At rest from baffling winds and Thetis' power.

But drifting sands have shut her from the sea,
 Whose murmuring waters washed erstwhile her
 feet,
And cool dim woods are stirred with melody
 Of birds, that flit and call, and answer sweet
 From moss-hid nests, where wrathful surges beat

Before, and sea-birds, circling slantingwise,
Dipped down the yellow surf with shrilly cries.

Forgotten now of emperor and king,—

Yet as the incense o'er the altar waits,
Though long ago the censer ceased to swing,—

A legendary light illuminates
Her silent palaces, whose empty gates,
Forsaken of their guests, no hand again
Shall ever ope to sun or bar to rain.

And save that shrine of him, the bard divine,
No good thing tempts the pilgrim's wandering
way

Within her narrow streets ; no longer shine
The lights of midnight revel,—all the gay
And happy songs are dead upon her gray
Still lips, that fortune, fickle lover, oft
In other days had thrilled with kisses soft.

Nor aught is heard of music in her streets,
Save here perchance a maiden singing o'er
Her work : the pulse of life responsive beats
No more to stirring sounds of peace or war,
For this the peace that dwells within her
door
Is that which hovers o'er the chilling clay
Ere yet the spirit passeth quite away.

I I.

Now in that long gone time of which men tell,

Within a smiling chamber, where the rays

Of loving suns last lingered and first fell,

A maiden stands, and looks with dreamy gaze

Across the sunclad sea, and level lays,

That stretch beneath the lattice window wide,

In the still sleep of summer eventide.

Nor sees the purple haze upon the height,

The curved-horned cattle browsing on the downs,

The slim acacia-hedges, flowering white

In slender lines between the gray-walled towns,

The grain-fields gilding their tiara crowns

Where first the river, winding wearily,
Tastes the salt kisses of the waiting sea.

Her wide soft eyes looked out beyond the rim
Of hill and sea, as to some far land green
With spring, where, revery leading, made them
dim

With happy tears too shy to fall, or e'en
Some wondrous note of sweetness unforeseen
Had wakened in the heart that, half afraid,
Enraptured heard the song itself had made.

And dreaming still, till all the mellow flood
Of color touched and vanished as a cry

Beyond the vineyard-terraced hills, she stood

As in a vision ; and across the sky

The white moon, stately as a princess, high

Amid a thousand stars, moved silently,

Her silver trailing dress upon the sea :

Then folded up her dream in her deep heart,

And waking, blushed to know it hidden there.

For Guido, Lord of Cervia, apart,

In suddenwise, within his daughter's hair

Had set a blossom only one may wear :

And all the day as one who slept and dreamed,

And waked to dream her dream again, she
seemed.

And all the day a wistful yearning, sweet

And pitiful, alas! and sharp surprise,

And timid dread of that she would not meet

Yet would not lose, was mingled in her eyes,

Hope answering to fear in soft replies.

O little Heart! that throbs and beats, who may

Translate thy music or thy tumult weigh!

Within the sunny garden of her life,

Where only murmuringwise upon her ears

Fell undiscerned the turmoil of men's strife,

What should she know of all the sin and

tears

That stain the purple raiment of the years;

Of love made loathing, and of mocked desire,
Of mould within the seed, that wastes as fire

Erewhile it blooms, of all the ills that blight

Ere foolish hope be wholly turned to scorn,

The little space and span of man's delight.

For in her heart each image fair was born,

As flowers, standing in the doors of morn,

Ere yet the lurking shadows, one by one,

Gather and deepen in the noontide sun.

So must it be,—for if to him who first

The toilsome way begun, were told the sin,

The pain, the shame, the hunger and the thirst,

How should he dare the journey to begin!
How would he rather choose again to win
That rest serene, whence coming, man but may
Return, nor break its slumber by a day!

I I I.

Divided then was all that land. Within
Her door the good wife trembling saw afar
The flash of shields. A little gold to win
The sword was drawn, nor loth were hands to mar
What lips had sworn. And Guido, long at war,
And fearing oaths but lightly pledged, would fain
With holier vows the new-made truce maintain.

But one whose crafty counsel in the things

Of state he sought, made answer thus: "Beware,

O friend, of this that thou wilt do. The wings

Of love are strong and free, and were he heir,

This Malatesta lord, to virtues rare

As brilliants chosen for a royal crown,

Well at their setting might a maiden frown.

"Now if this man she see, nor I, nor thou,

Shall move her mind to wed with him. But

let

His brother Paulo come to take the vow,

That thus a maiden's fancies may not set

At naught thy pleasure, and new perils yet

The state assail." And thus unwittingly

Came Paulo, with a goodly company,

And gifts, the lily of the land to wed.

And so it happened that as down the street

That 'neath the palace windows winding led,

With tumult of men's voices and the feet

Of horses, passed the train, in shy retreat,

Francesca, with her maids, behind the half

Closed lattice stood. To whom with merry

laugh

One said: "Lo, lady, this is he, thy lord."

Who, when with timid wondering to prove

Her dreams, she saw him thus in such accord

Therewith, straightway from that time forth her
love

In him she placed, nor knew what snare was wove
About her way, nor dreamed that love made sin
Should all the song make mute her heart within.

Full oft the perfect gift of happy days,

That dazzling pass as stars across our sky,
Is the sweet after-thought, that still delays

When low the stars 'neath the horizon lie,

And all the tumult of our joy 's gone by.

Below the world's far edge dips from our view
The sun, but leaves behind his softest hue.

So in some twilight chamber of our lives,
Oft watch we peaceful with a memory
Sweet as the long passed rapture it survives.
And oft Francesca in the days to be,
Should clothe herself again in fantasy,
With robes of white and pearls, o't hear again
The dim vaults echo back the deep refrain

Of chanting choir, should feel anew the faint
Breath of the censer steal, a holy spell,
About her soul, and feign the sweet constraint
That mingled with the joy she could not
tell
The rapture of a kiss might but dispel.

Beneath the gate's wide span, where overhead,

Half white on field of azure, and half red

On field of gold, the eagle shone, oft should

She pass, and with her lover seek anew

The selfsame fields and summer-scented wood

That once before, with merry retinue

Of laughter and of song, they journeyed

through,

Till, counting thus of bliss her little store,

She comes, as on that festal night, once more

The wonder of all eyes, girt round with praise.

The circling sheen of pearls upon her bare

White throat, as 'twere not tinted by the rays
Of southern suns, and yellower her hair
Than was the golden fillet twining there ;
And in her face a light divine, as one
Who called of Heaven knows her refuge won.

And long they say throughout that land was
told

How unto men she came, a breath of some
Forgotten sweetness lost to life grown old ;
A glimmer of the dawn and fields abloom,
To light within the heart's long darkened room
The faces of the dead, that moulder not
As things of earth, but slumbering, forgot

Of men, wait for the issue of the night.

O life ! that hath for love so little ruth ;—

For love is more than life, though life should blight

All sweet false dreaming with its bitter truth,

And all that makes the paradise of youth,

Dissolve as clouds, that gild the morning's train

With golden fleece, to melt at night in rain.

And all that night, though love were slain, the

sea

Played with the shadows of the stars, heedless

The nightingale his midnight melody

Outpoured, and through the summer quietness,

Unbroken, save where in the bay's recess,

Secure at last, the weary boatmen furled
With song their glistening sails, slept on the world.

*High up the mountain slope,
The frailest blossoms ope
To morning dew, and hide in rest
At night upon the crater's breast.*

*Close in the narrow path,
That no side turning hath,
A shining angel waits, nor saith
To him who comes, My kiss is death !*

I V.

Though in its circuit summer wind should see

The death of summer flowers, it would not stay ;

Beneath the winter snow, as joyously

The river runs as when, in time of May,

The grasses stooped to hear what it should say.

In bright dim gates of birth alone a cry

Is born, and in the gates of death a sigh,

That with the voice of Nature has no kin ;

There is no place in all her wide domain

For one regretful tear ; only within

The spirit infinite is room for pain.

So stir of life no heaviness can chain,

And softly coming dawn returned, and dumb
Night, waking, broke anew in song. So come

The days as women beautiful in dreams :

Each with her handmaids two,—sweet Joy, whose
smile,

Bespeaking unto men heaven's pity, seems

To wrap the world in peace, as seas the isle :

But in her shadow, as a veil the while,
Walks Sorrow, silent and unseen of all,
Save those on whom perchance her sad eyes fall.

Day follows hard the night. The rocks make haste
To clothe a little while their barren breasts ;

The buds swell swiftly, for the winds that waste
Are stirring in the north. A thousand nests
Are building fast, wherein a new world rests
But so to gain a little strength of wing,
To follow on the footsteps of the spring.

So swift the whirling wheel it seems to stand :
Each broken life, as dreams that caught in
sleep
Still go before, weaves on the endless strand.
Men listen for the voice of them that weep,
But still and smooth as waters where they leap
The gulf, the flowing sea gives back no sound ;—
Not yet the secret told, the answer found.

For this the gods are kind, that men may see

Some footprints on the sliding sands of space,

But not the wondrous feet :—some shadows flee

As clouds that pass above and leave no trace,

Some far-off light, but not the hidden face :

May catch some dim strange strain no waiting ear

May understand, for this the gods are dear.

V.

Rich food for many tongues that bridal proved,

For straightway knew all men how she was wed

To Guanciotto, and not him she loved.

And if some hearts awhile sweet pity led,

As little waves, stirred in their shallow bed

Alike by breeze and tempest, soon are still,
So scarce a day such things their hearts did fill.

For cruel waking on that morn she had,
When first her husband's face with shrinking eyes
She knew, and 'gan within her heart once glad
With all the merry world might bring, to rise
A loathing fear of that she fain would prize,
And from the fields above, the waters all,
So sweet unto her lips, seemed touched with gall.

"Ah me!" she cried, "that I may finish fast
The bitter draught life's narrowing rim clasps
round,

And so that pearl of peace I gain at last,

That not in all the flowers its margin bound,

But only in its dark drained depth is found."

Strange ! how each one some time upon life's way,

How fair soever then it be, how gray

Soe'er it stretches to the mist-hung west,

Knows well that there within the dusk, not here,

Though fair sky stoop to fairer fields, is rest.

Intent on matters to his heart more dear

Than woman's love, her lord, they say who near

These twain were, might not know a woman's
need;

He saw her face, yet seeing might not read,

Her scorn, but not her tears. "Forsooth, she hath
 Been overreached," he said, "the jewelled store
Of Malatesta's bride will stay the wrath
 Of her soft eyes." And jesting lightly o'er
 A maiden's fancies, soon the brief days wore
That he should tarry with her, and anon
To a far land he governed he was gone.

So seemed the worst thing done; and summer
 wrought
 From hill to belt of sea its dress of green,
And to that land glad gifts the autumn brought.
 Yet had the lapse of hours no spell to wean
 Her sad, enduring thought from what had been.

Above her golden cushion still she hears
The pulse of love, and broiders only tears.

No idle talk of maids might mar for her

The dream that in her lute's low music fled,
Of what should be, when from the sepulchre

The stone were rolled, and Love were in Fate's
stead.

Haply within the awful hush of dead
Desires, when men no longer fain would know
Whither at night the red suns silent go,

Some peace, a peace of vanished hopes, may hide.

But solitude for her was as the breath

Of spring to quicken what perchance had died.—

A tomb wherein as one none comforteth,

She entered with the dead and watched with
death,

And set against her woe the joy she might

Not leave, a thing forgotten in the night.

For though an angel, pleading, to her lips

Had borne a draught so peaceful and so deep

That all her pain had found therein eclipse,

Yet had she deemed it still more sweet to keep

The memories that stirred her troubled sleep

As with the tremor of a kiss, whose thrill

She had not known till lips and heart were still.

For so, scarce conscious of our joy, we wait

Expectant, looking for some better guest,

As he who sees the moving clouds too late,

Alas ! too late, turn golden in the west ;

Or sudden feels the odorous breath, when pressed

Beneath his feet, the flower yields at last

The fragrance round his life it fain had cast.

No more the palace seemed a bridal-place ;

Masking nor feast Francesca's presence knew ;

And if some time perchance men saw her face

When to the garden close she slowly drew,

Where dark upon the brown moss thickest

grew

The shade, such trouble seemed thereon to bide,
As only death within its peace may hide.

Goodly that pleasance was ; its border fringed
 With yellow grass the sea that ofttimes flung
Therein the flakes of salt froth, amber tinged,
 And on the sloping reach of pebbles sung
 The selfsame yearning song, as first among
The sleeping hills and shallow shining bars,
Unheard, it whispered to the new-lit stars.

Beyond were shadowed spaces of a wood,
 Low boughed, where on the river's edge of
 sand,

Waist-deep and scarcely stirred, the sedges stood,—
And blossoms, strewn as by a sower's hand,
Sailed out into the open pasture-land,
Where like a white arm wound about the lea,
The river kept the meadows from the sea.

There might she hear, among the wind-blown
boughs,
Such sounds as fain would set her feet in
some
New place, beyond the far hills' lifted brows,—
Whereto the limbs above, with gesture dumb,
Swayed beckoning, and the swift stream cried,
Come !

And on its bosom floating to the sea

The blossoms answered, Follow, follow me.

O Nature! Sweet to every stricken one,

Thy voices, infinite in harmony,

Chant secret things of peace. And thou alone

Shalt lull to slumber, motherwise, all cry

Of pain, e'en as at last so tenderly

Thou gatherest our honor or our shame

Unto thy silent bosom whence we came.

For though the moaning sea moan not its

dead,

And all the glistening tears about the mound

Of blessed dust are but the cold dew shed
From out a colder sky, yet have men found
No waywise voice like to that solemn sound
Of waves, than the sweet earth no breast
So soft, whereon to lay their lips at rest.

VI.

And thus it fell that Paulo from the chase
Passed in the gloaming of the wood, till through
The flowering thorn he brake unto a space
That scarce all day the summer sunshine knew,—
And sudden as within the place he drew,
Beheld her first since on that night of shame,
Girt round with wonder and with praise she came.

Face unto face awhile in the dim wood,

So near that he might see the white pearls rise

And tremble in her loosened gown, they stood,—

Such sudden light within her yearning eyes,

As made those joyless days in some sweet wise

As dreams, of a long-ending night and drear,

That sudden fails from dusk to dawn, appear.

Nay! was it strange his eager hands reached out

Unto his love, unto his sweet, and thus

At last the wasting pain, the fiery drought,

Should cease,—strange that her kind eyes mar-
vellous

Stirred all his heart with longing, tremulous

As fear, pulsing as pain,—that he should buy
One little hour of love with life and die!

Like the fair blossoming edge of heaven's shore,
Only a daisied path between lay low ;
Yet he moved not, for e'en such fear passed
o'er

Her troubled face as love alone may know,—
As shrinking back, yet with sad step and slow,
Pleading yet mute, in the dim shuddering light
She moved, a fading vision, from his sight.

Long time he stood, yet as one seeing naught
About him, or how 'gan the day among

The hollows of the hills to sleep. Fulfraught
With the sweet treasures of far fields, scarce hung
The bees above the folding flowers, scarce swung
In topmost branches the hushed nests, and dim
Were grown the shadows on the river's rim.

But in his ears, though lonesome was the place,
Were sounds confused of laughter and of mirth,
And in his eyes a well-beloved face,
And in his heart, as flowers that have their
birth

In waste forgotten places of the earth,
Sweet flickering memories; till once again
He heard the bridal song, and twain by twain,

Fair hand in hand, the white-clad maids, at last

With lingering steps that scarce the measured
strain

Might keep, from the bride-chamber slowly passed ;

And with strange shame and fear, sweet unto pain,

He heard soft footfalls of the passing train,

As voice by voice the joyous song decreased,

Until at last footfall and singing ceased,—

Then woke, to hear the unremembering wind

Moan to the river lapping on its shore

Of reeds, and far through gathering mist and blind

Th' incoming sea send sullen answer o'er

Its sands, and waking, knew that evermore

His love the measure of her woe should be,
The wound that fleeing still she might not flee.

*O Love ! the sea is deep whence thou wast born,
And in thine eyes betimes such sweet light hides,
As of dim depths where night and noon are morn ;
Beneath the bosom of its fitful tides
Men say indissoluble peace abides,—
And yet so swift thy shifting lights, ah me !
Who knows, who knows, if so or no it be ?*

*O Love ! thy crown is laughter, and the foam
Of sun-loved seas is round thy feet. Thy breath
Is as the breath of winds that have their home*

*In summer-loving lands, forgot of death,—
Soft winds, that stir the reach of purple heath
With sighing sounds of restfulness or woe,—
Ah me ! who knows if so it be or no ?*

*Below the glitter of thy sea, O Love,
Men say the dead innumerable lie ;
And that the red rose paler blooms above
The lonesome grave, and winds that wander by,
Linger about the home of them that die :
But thou art glad, as they who no death know,
Ah me ! who knows if it be so or no ?*

VII.

Within the palace is a room beneath

Whose window, at its weary journey's end,

The quiet river sleeps. Their sweetest breath

The distant groves within its lattice send,—

Around its sunny oriel casement bend

The blossoming vines, amid whose moving shades

A woman sits, and weaves her silken braids

In patterns not less delicate than they.

She does not hear without the boatman's song,

Nor yet the oar's soft splash and dripping play,

But oft the pauses of her work among,

Her sad eyes turn to one who reads the wrong

That shamed King Arthur's court. And as the
strain

Reveals the King, great-hearted, without stain,

She thinks of him, her lord,—not like, ah! no,

Not like to him,—and that for her had been

No happy bowers of Usk or Camelot,

No love, no faith as had that faithless Queen,

But only treachery, and hate between

A pity and a scorn. And in that dumb

Far past she saw again her lover come

With music down the crowded streets, once more

She lived that gala day of joy, and rode

Beside him through the open city door,

As out into a world new made of God.

What cruel way would not her feet, unshod

And bleeding, press, if so she might but gain

At last from mist of tears and fire of pain

But one such day! The children, what a voice

Of merriment was theirs that bridal morn!

What strange new life that bade the world rejoice!

What keener sight, as though Heaven's veil were

torn

And a new Paradise for man were born!

Almost she were content that Queen to be,

If but again such things her eyes might see.

The golden threads lay idle in her hands :—

Full breasted as a flood, whose glistening spray
Leaves but the wreck within its waste of sands,

So came these memories of another day,

And passed the present woe but to betray.

Poor Heart ! that hadst indeed laid love at rest,

But wrought its tomb within thine own warm breast.

For here it chanced he read of the Queen's smile

When kissed of Launcelot, and reading, still

Was conscious of her gaze, and felt the while

The subtle spell whose influences thrill

From heart to heart in cunning ways where

will

Is slave, and lifting from the page apace

His eyes, beheld, alas ! her radiant face.

So moving down that vale, whose end they knew,

Of sweetest flowers and sharpest thorns, came

they

At last thereto ; and waiting Rumor through

The air took wing upon her doleful way.

So, clothed in scorn or pity, shall men say

On thee the blight of Eden too must cling,

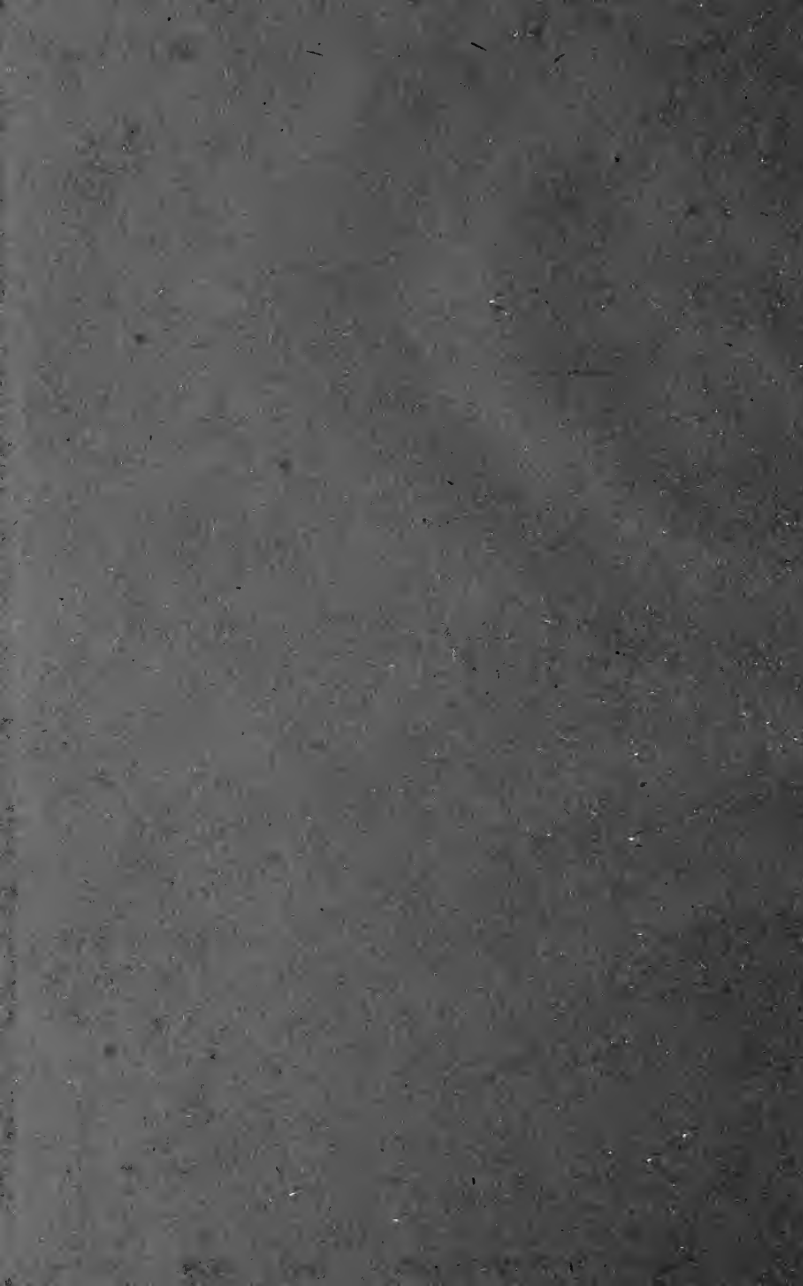
O Love ! thou Jester, that wast born a King !

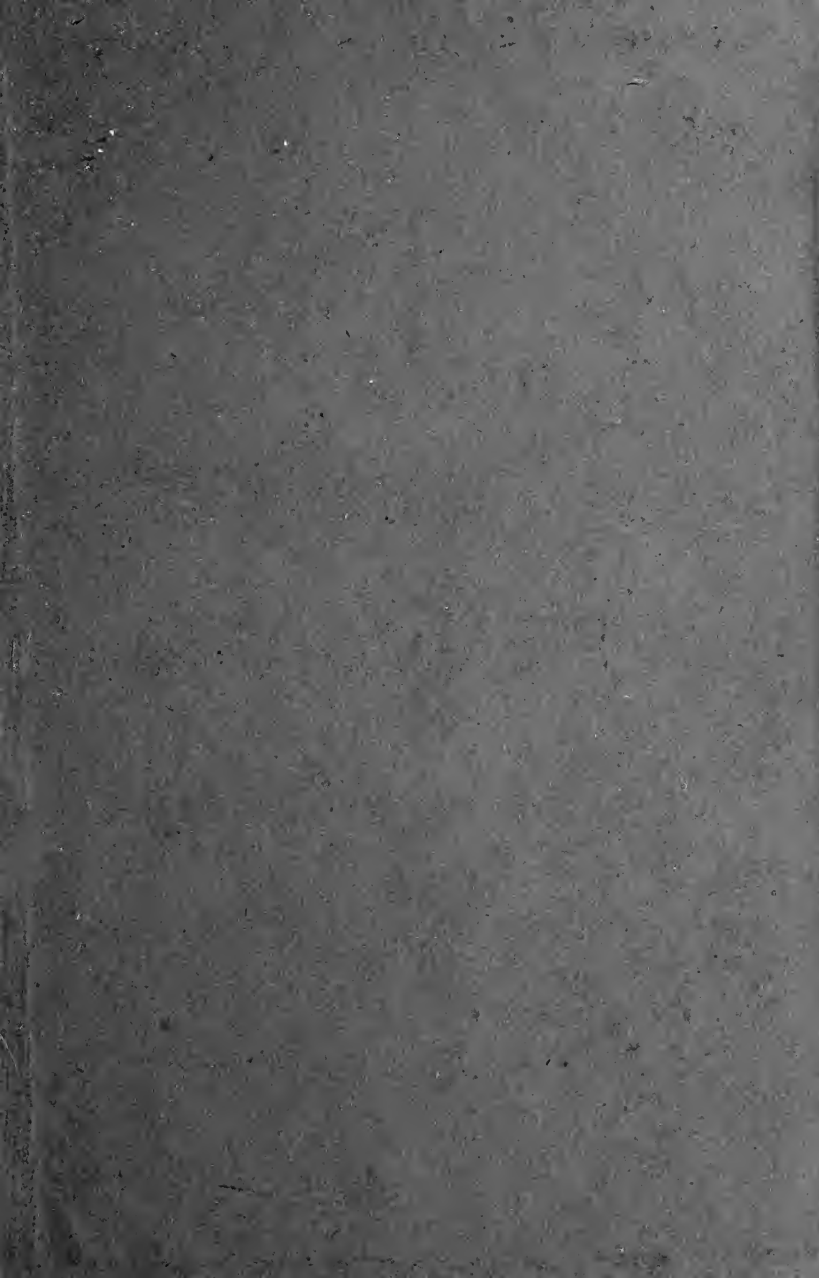
O ye who leave the world a stainless name,

And sitting peaceful on the splendid heights,

Behold it shine amid the years, a flame
As of the stars, whose everlasting lights
Burn unexhausted through eternal nights,
How have ye wrought within life's scanty days
Of toil, with mortal hands, immortal praise !

O fool ! Here is no marvel ; straight and true
The slender threads the web of exquisite
Design run through, or ravelling, all undo.
And from time's little span, in rhythmic flight,
The hours rejoin the pulsings infinite,
With wail discordant, or in melody
Sweet voiced, as birds that seek the upper sky.





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 018 597 437 6